

The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP) is a network of established and emerging rural institutions that work together to strengthen rural America. The principal members of the network are State Rural Development Councils in 40 of the 50 states.

Each of the State Councils, which are comprised of active members from a broad range of rural development-related organizations, is served by a full-time executive director. States differ in how they are organized and in the rural issues they decide to address.

This profile is one in a series highlighting the work of the State Councils.

For more information about the National Rural Development Partnership:

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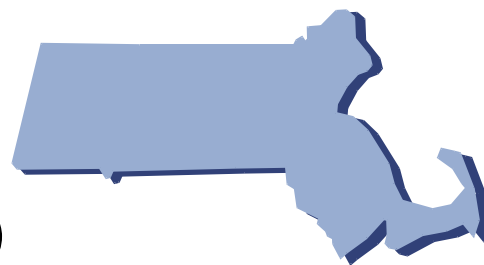
World Wide Web:
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp>



**National Rural
Development
Partnership**

State Profile

Massachusetts Rural Development Council (MRDC)



Formed in 1993, the Massachusetts Rural Development Council, Inc. (MRDC) is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to improving the quality of life in rural Massachusetts, while preserving the characteristics that give rural communities their unique sense of place. As a not-for-profit entity (1997), the Council serves as a neutral convener of local, state, government, and private interests as well as a project initiator. MRDC provides a voice for rural Massachusetts, serves as a forum for addressing systematic issues, and provides effective means for problem solving in rural communities.

The Council's ability to bring institutions and individuals together spurs the creative thinking that benefits all of rural Massachusetts. Although the Council takes on many original projects, it also serves as a value-added partner for existing programs, providing resources, experience, knowledge, and contacts to leverage new and existing resources. MRDC Council members include private for-profit entities; private non-profit entities; federal, state, tribal, local and county government; regional development orga-

nizations; higher education institutions; and citizens. Using its diverse membership as a resource network, the Council functions as a catalyst to strengthen Massachusetts's rural communities. In achieving its goals, MRDC has worked on a number of projects that showcase its unique ability to positively impact rural areas and the perceptions of rural communities in a very urbanized state. Recent projects include BATON Access, Community Visit, and Urban/Rural Dialogue sessions.

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The MRDC has over 30 active partner institutions working on research, policy, and actions affecting rural development throughout the state. Some of these partners include:

- ▼ Central Massachusetts Regional Employment Board
- ▼ RHI, The Northeast RCAP
- ▼ Local government agencies
- ▼ Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
- ▼ Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- ▼ USDA-Rural Development
- ▼ Massachusetts Department of Social Services
- ▼ Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- ▼ New England Small Farm Institute
- ▼ Mt. Wachusett Community College
- ▼ New England Small Farm Institute
- ▼ Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture
- ▼ Ware Community Development
- ▼ University of Massachusetts
- ▼ Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- ▼ Wampanoag Tribal Government
- ▼ Franklin Community Action Corporation
- ▼ Verizon
- ▼ Blue Cross of Massachusetts
- ▼ Small Town and Rural Legislative Caucus
- ▼ University of Massachusetts



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NRDP State Profile

July 2001

Massachusetts Rural Development Council at Work

BATON Access

MRDC provided seed funds that supported a winning proposal for a \$543,000 Technology Opportunity Program grant that will fund the Building Access to Organization Network (BATON) Project, designed to provide a virtual site for many of the state social service agencies and the Commonwealth's contractors in Hampshire County, MA. This project will use web-based technologies to build networks between state agencies, non-profit providers, and families that need services. The project will also help eliminate barriers for families by quickly bringing information for assistance to their homes or local libraries over the Internet. MRDC's representatives have assisted in shaping the breadth of the program offerings and helped to assure that the concept and mission of the project are maintained as BATON is incorporated into the broader MASS-CARES e-government program at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

"The Massachusetts Rural Development Council is an important resource for rural legislators in our predominantly urban state."

**Rep. Stephen Kulik
(D-Worthington),
House Chair, Legislative
Small Town and Rural Caucus**

Summing up the collective attitude of those participating in the event, Guerino explains, "We listen. And the outcome will be a report based on what we've heard." After the visit was completed, the Visit Team presented its findings to the town in a report.

Rural/Urban Similarities Addressed

MRDC hosted the first in a series of Urban/Rural Dialogue sessions on February 26, 2001. The City of Worcester, and the MA Dept. of Housing and Community Development co-hosted the event. Featured

speakers were Congressman James McGovern of Worcester and Charles Fluharty, Director of the National Rural Policy Research Institute.

The event focused on areas where central city and rural communities may find commonality and ways to pursue policy and service delivery changes. More than 80

people attended from numerous local, state, federal, and community service agencies. The event provided participants with networking opportunities and a chance to pick up new ideas for improving service in specific delivery areas. Working sessions covered various topics such as: housing affordability and availability; oral health issues such as accessibility; business and entrepreneurial opportunities and obstacles; and juvenile justice issues.

The outcome of the sessions is expected to be the formation of working committees to move forward to adjust policy and funding streams on the state and national levels to better the lives of both rural and urban populations. MRDC will continue to include Urban/Rural Dialogue in its ongoing work.

Community Visit

The MRDC Executive Board, at its 2000 Annual Retreat, decided to pursue community visits as a way to serve rural Massachusetts communities. A team of MRDC Board members, Executive Director Tom Guerino, and representatives of MA Dept. of Housing and Community Development traveled to the town of Douglas for a two-day event called "Common Threads - the Quilting of Ideas." The first day of the event was kicked off with a presentation by community and economic development specialist Richard Beatty followed by a solicitation of ideas from the citizens for various buildings and sites in town. The second day included interactive discussion sessions led by MRDC team members.